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ABSTRACT

As well as describing the present state of development of community schools in the province of Alberta, this study also examined the organizational and environmental characteristics of Alberta community school education programs. Questionnaires were completed by 93 school administrators, 462 teachers and 1,110 community members. Interviews were held with 84 students and 28 administrators. Findings indicated that in none of the schools was the community school education component developed as much as in a hypothetical model chosen. The regular program at the community schools was based significantly more on local community activities than was the program at comparison schools. The community schools had significantly more programs for students and adults and more community involvement in decision-making. Teachers but not community members indicated that people associated with the school had significantly more control over school affairs in community schools. No significant differences existed between the community schools and comparison schools in teacher job satisfaction and status, or student satisfaction. Community schools placed more emphasis on evaluating programs and school-community relations. Most of those interviewed wanted more emphasis placed on community school activities. It was important to community school principals that their school boards took an active interest in community school education. (Author/JM)

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COMMUNITY SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

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COMMUNITY SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

Minzey and Le Tarte (1972), Seay (1974), Davis (1974) and Gittell (1970) believe that the large population growth in North America, coupled with the trend to centralize social services has made life more impersonal for many people, especially those in urban centers. Hiemstra (1972:12) also suggests that the technological revolution has been a major factor in fostering impersonal relationships among people. He wrote:

> All phases of society have been affected by the resulting changes. For example, it has increased specialization which has led to more and larger organizations, greater bureaucracy, and growing impersonalness between workers. Consequently, ties to a community for whatever reason are becoming slight or often temporary and transitory.

Each of these writers suggest that one way to reduce the impersonality of life is to encourage people to develop a sense of community. They propose the concepts of community education and/or community school as possible solutions to develcping or maintaining a sense of community.

Tangible evidence of a desire to develop components of the community education or community school concept in Canada can be seen in reports such as the Edmonton Public Schools' (1971) "The Community School: A Focus on Living; "The Nova Scotia Royal Commission on Education, Public Services and Provincial Municipal Relations Vol. III (Government of Nova Scotia, 1974) and, the Province of Ontario's What Happens Next is Up to You (The Select Committee on the Utilization of Educational Facilities, 1975).

These three reports have one important feature in common. They draw on little or no evidence of the characteristics or success of community schools as documented by research.

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This lack of research referencing is not entirely the fault of the report writers because little research has been completed in Canada or the United States in the area of community schools and/or community education (Decker, 1972:2). Seay and associates (1974:393) stated that, "With the exception of the 15 doctoral dissertations cited by Totten and doctoral dissertations along with some masters theses included by Olsen, most of the (American) works cited are descriptions of experiences of practitioners and observers in the field." No publication dealing with community schools other than on an anecdotal, or participant frequency-count level, appears to be available in Canada.

With the increasing interest in community schools throughout Canada and the lack of research on the subject, the area appeared to be appropriate for study.

Description of Study

This study (Sullivan, 1976) could best be described as exploratory. The lack of research in the area of community education and community schools made it essential to develop an instrument to assist in the identification of existing community schools, to determine environmental and organizational variables relevant to these community schools and, to compare the perceptions of community members toward these community schools and comparison schools. The study has attempted to answer questions in these three areas. However, due to the time limitations of this paper, no findings relevant to the environmental characteristics will be reported.

Community schools were studied by identifying the community schools already operating in the Province of Alberta and then analyzing the organizational characteristics of these schools. In addition, a comparison of the top ten Alberta community schools was made to ten randomly selected matched schools (not considered to be community schools) to detect characteristics unique to community schools.

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Community School Education

Seven components, as presented below, were considered necessary to community school educational programs. The first six components were outlined by Minzey (1974) and the seventh component was introduced because much of the literature suggests that community school education cannot be pursued with great vigor or success without sufficient funds, and an administrator or coordinator, spending a considerable amount of time promoting community school relations.

1. Regular grade 1-12 program with particular emphasis on relating the curriculum to the local community;
2. Joint use of school and community facilties;
3. Additional programs for school age children;
4. Programs for adults;
5. Delivery and coordination of community services;
6. Community involvement in decision making;
7. Administration: coordinator and finances.

Instrumentation and Methodology

Three questionnaires were designed to collect data. The first, the School-Community Questionnaire (SCQ), was completed by 83 community school principals and 10 comparison school principals, and provided information on the seven community school education components with respect to each of the schools. The 83 community schools were schools identified by the Alberta school superintendents as following a community school mode of operation. The comparison schools were randomly selected from the Alberta schools that were not identified by the superintendents as community schools and, eventually, were matched with the top 10 community schools on variables such as school size, school grade levels and type of school community.

The information from each school's SCQ was scored with respect to the degree to which the school resembles a model community school. Then the top 10 community schools and the 10 comparison schools were used to determine the organizational characteristics that were descriptive of community schools and the acceptability of these characteristics to teachers, students and community members.

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Second, the Teachers' Questionnaire (TQ), was designed to collect information from the teachers in the 20 sample schools involving their commitment to and satisfaction with community school education. One hundred and sixty-four (80.0 percent) TQ's were returned from the top 10 community schools and 149 (64.5 percent) TQ's were returned from the comparison schools.

Third, the Community Members' Questionnaire (CMQ) was designed to collect information from the community members in the areas of the sample schools with regard to their perception of the control and goals of the schools. Four hundred and sixty-four (58.0 percent) CMQ's were returned from the top 10 community schools and 329 (41.1 precent) CMQ's were returned from the comparison schools.

Three students from each school were interviewed. The principal was asked to choose, from the upper grades of the school, students of average academic ability and socially acceptable to their peers. If the school had a students' council, the principal was asked to include the pres dent of the council in the sample of three students.

Treatment of the Data

All data from the SCQ's, TQ's and CMQ's were coded and written on computer data punching forms. Then computer cards were punched and verified by a trained key-punch operator.

The interview data were subjected to content analysis (Holsti, 1969), and coded and collated under each item referred to in the interview schedules. The data were transferred to individual master sheets for each question.

The interview data were described by utilizing percentages and frequencies. The questionnaire variables were analyzed with the assistance of t-tests and F-tests. Whenever the F-ratio was significant, this test was followed by the Scheffé method of testing for significant differences between pairs of means. The a priori level of significance for all tests was set at .05 (two-tailed). Statistical tests of significance were not used on the interview data because these data were nominal variables.

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Programs and Facilities

Conclusions. Generally, the regular educational program at the community schools in the study was based significantly more on local community activities than was the program in the comparison schools studied. Administrators, teachers, students and community members from both community and comparison schools preferred to have significantly more importance placed on a community based program.

The community schools made significantly more joint use of school and community facilities. Administrators, community members and teachers from both community and comparison schools preferred to have significantly more importance placed on the joint use of school and community facilities.

The community schools had (proportionately) significantly more additional programs for students, and more students in these programs, than did comparison schools. Generally, administrators, teachers and community members from both community and comparison schools preferred to have significantly more importance placed on these types of programs than was the case.

The community schools had (proportionately) significantly more adult programs, and more participants in these programs, than did comparison schools. From both types of schools, only teachers and administrators preferred to have significantly more importance placed on the presentation of adult programs than was the case.

Implications. With the community schools' programs and use of facilities differing significantly from that of the comparison schools, both educators and laypersons may find the knowledge of these differences helpful in deciding to promote or retard the growth of community schools in their areas. A more community-based curriculum would seem to imply two major differences from a "non-community school" situation. First, educators in community schools must take the initiative in developing, or at least locating, curricula that reflects the local community lifestyle and must be given the freedom to do so. Second, community members should be encouraged to participate in school activities and share their knowledge and expertise with the teachers and students.

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An increase in the joint use of school and community facilities implies higher maintenance costs; flexible scheduling allowing students to leave the school during regular school hours to use community facilities; joint agreements between the school board and other organizations with respect to the facilities and costs; and community members, other than regular daytime students, using all school facilities.

With community schools placing more emphasis than comparison schools on additional programs for children, the regular school staff should be prepared to assume responsibility for some of these programs, and to encourage community members to assist in the planning and instruction of many other programs.

Administrators should be aware that an increase in adult programs would possibly mean that some adults will want to have programs during regular school hours, causing some timetabling problems. However, most adult programs are held at night, creating a need for instructors and maintenance staff, both of which require additional money from the board and/or provincial government.

Community Involvement and Control

Conclusion. Community schools had significantly more community involvement than did comparison schools. Also it is interesting to note that administrators, teachers and community members from both types of schools preferred to have significantly more community involvement than was the case.

When asked how much control was exercised over local school affairs (curriculum, budget and staff) by different people from the superintendent and board to students and parents, the teachers in the study indicated that the same types of people control community schools and comparison schools. But in community schools the teachers saw these people as having significantly more control over local school affairs than they did in comparison schools. However, the community members did not perceive any significant difference between community schools and comparison schools with respect to the control over local school affairs by these same categories of people.

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Implications. With significantly more community involvement in community schools than comparison schools, educators will be involved in more sharing of decision-making powers and consultation with community members. Community school educators will have to know their community members better and be more politically astute and accepting of the contribution of others to the school program than would educators in other schools. Community members will have to assume more direct responsibility for their school, and school boards and government departments will have to relinquish some of their power over schools, giving it to local community committees.

Teacher Job Satisfaction and Status

Conclusions. Utilizing two factors of the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire (Bentley and Rempel, 1967), no significant differences were found between the community schools and comparison schools with respect to the job satisfaction or status of teachers. In addition, no differences existed between the general satisfaction of students in the two types of schools.

Implications. The lack of significant differences in job satisfaction or status of teachers between community schools and comparison schools would seem to imply that teachers either adjust to their situation or gravitate to the type of school that they desire. If this is the case, school boards would have to maintain both community schools and non-community schools to satisify their teachers or make it clear to teachers, before hiring that the school district has only community schools or non-community schools.

Students seem to base their satisfaction upon such indigenous variables as friends and local neighborhood; and, they usually enjoy their own school whether or not it is a community school. However, none of the study's community schools was in a neighborhood adjoining a comparison school's neighborhood, so that the students in the study's comparison schools may not have had an opportunity to be knowledgeable about community schools. More study is definitely needed in this area.

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Coordination and Evaluation of Services

Conclusions. Community schools coordinated community services significantly better than did the comparison schools. Generally, teachers, administrators and community members from both types of schools preferred to have significantly more emphasis placed on coordinating community services to prevent a duplication or lack of services than was the case.

Overall, community schools in the study were preceived as placing significantly more emphasis than comparisen schools on evaluating their programs in relation to previously set goals. For both types of schools, community members, administrators and teachers preferred to have significantly more emphasis placed on this type of evaluation than was the case.

Implications. The staff of community schools cannot unilaterally decide to adjust course offerings or services, but should consult with other community service agencies. These educators work with other agencies to avoid duplication and lack of services.

With an emphasis on evaluation in community schools, the school staff should be aware that their work will be under closer scrutiny in community schools than in other schools. This should be a positive aspect for trustees to consider when thinking about the promotion of community schools.

Administration

Conslusions. Of the schools in the study, the community schools placed significantly more time and effort into administering school-community relations than did comparison schools. Generally, teachers and community members from both types of schools preferred schools to provide significantly more administrative leacership in the community than was the case.

Implications. The general increase of responsibilities assumed by community schools (e.g. adult programs) demands that significantly more time be spent on administering programs and activities in community schools than in comparison schools. This increase in administrative workload usually creates a need for a

new administrative position, most often called a community school coordinator. This new position would increase salary costs for the school board and may introduce unusual problems of role definition in the school system. The incumbent would be expected to work closely with the school staff inside the school and with community members and agencies outside the school in the local community, both during and after regular school hours. These responsibilities are much different from the responsibilities of teachers and administrators in most schools.

Summary

Emphasis should be placed on the findings that teachers, students, community members and administrators from both community schools and comparison schools generally desired to have their schools place more importance on the goals or components of community school education than was presently the case. This was particularly applicable to the community members. Trustees, educators at the university and public school levels and personnel from government departments should be aware of these results. A further development of community education components seems to be appropriate for all schools.